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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6640
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0711
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0576
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4109
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7666
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5225
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1010
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000986

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DEPT FOR P,EAP/MLS, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL BM

SUBJECT: BURMESE EFFORTS TO GAIN U.S. UNDERSTANDING

Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge received word from the Foreign Ministry of a possible attack on the U.S. Embassy, which she dismissed as ludicrous, and advice that Embassy officers stay away from demonstrations, which she rejected on the grounds that we needed accurate information about what was going on. Charge and the Deputy Foreign Minister spent most of their meeting debating what constitutes progress towards a political transition. The steps they described fall far short of what we would like to see, but, despite their regular diatribes against us, they want to keep talking with us, which gives us the opportunity to push for more. End Summary

¶2. (C) The Foreign Ministry invited the Charge to travel to Nay Pyi Taw on October 5 for a briefing by Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint on the current situation. We also learned that the Chinese and Russian Ambassadors had been invited for briefings by the same official on October 4. Charge met with the Chinese Ambassador to get his readout of his briefing, which was considerably different from Charge's meeting (see para 9).

Say What?

¶3. (C) Expecting to hear the regime's view of the Gambari visit, Charge was taken aback when Maung Myint began by reporting that the GOB had uncovered a plot by Generation 88 Student and NLD to steal weapons and uniforms in order to stage an attack on the U.S. Embassy and make it look like a Burmese Army attack. After asking him to repeat this to make sure she heard correctly, she dismissed the report as lacking credibility noting that she has met often with activists from both organizations, as the regime knows. He claimed to have sound sources, which were "very confirmed." Maung Myint then clarified that they would not really attack us, but would pretend to do so to make the Burmese Army look bad and harm US-Burmese relations. I noted that we already had strained relations, and suggested that the best way to avoid further strains would be to have more frequent discussions. Maung Myint replied that the GOB was always open to discussion, and promised to make sure that the Charge's future requests for meetings get approved.

14. (C) Then claiming that the GOB also is concerned about our security, Maung Myint asked Charge to keep Embassy staff away from demonstrations. Charge had earlier run into Europeans finishing up their Track II talks, who said their Burmese interlocutors had produced pictures of Emboffs at the demonstrations to back up their claims of US interference. Charge told Maung Myint that our observations of demonstrations were very important to ensure we had accurate information, noting that those first hand reports had been helpful for press interviews. He explained that Burmese military and police forces could not protect Emboffs from "destructive elements," so they should restrict their movements. Charge replied that the local authorities knew that Emboffs were only observing, and added that we had advised American citizens to stay away from large gatherings warning of the potential of violence from Burmese authorities.

Than Shwe Budges

15. (C) Maung Myint, having made the two points he had been ordered to make, then shifted discussion to highlight Senior General Than Shwe's conditional offer to meet personally with Aung San Suu Kyi. Separately the Track II participants told Charge that the Burmese had asked them if this would be interpreted as weakness. Charge told Maung Myint that useful discussions might result if the parties could avoid too many conditions. She asked if a senior liaison would be appointed to keep discussions going between ASSK and Than Shwe. Maung Myint asked if she wanted to be the liaison, to which Charge replied that a senior military officer who could talk directly to both would be better. Charge also said that it

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would helpful if the restrictions on access to ASSK could be eased so that she could consult more broadly with other interested Burmese. Maung Myint said that he would pass both suggestions to the senior generals.

16. (C) Maung Myint then noted that Gambari would be briefing the UN Security Council on October 5 and expressed the opinion that Than Shwe's offer was "very transparent." He then provided data on prisoners released (692 yesterday and 2000 today) and still detained (1034) and claimed that the authorities had used "minimum force" to break up the demonstrations. Charge commented that if Than Shwe's offer to talk had been announced on September 25, before any force had been used, it might have stopped the demonstrations peacefully. She asked if Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi would be released soon, and Maung Myint replied that some must undergo more interrogation. Charge asked if that involved torture, and Maung Myint turned to her with a big smile and said "we don't torture" then touched her on her arm and again repeated that. Charge repressed her shudders.

Political Transition Coming Very Soon, Be Patient

17. (C) Maung Myint launched into the standard defense of the roadmap, how that had to continue, could not be derailed, and appealed for understanding. Charge suggested that the process could be opened up at any stage, and urged the GOB to release the people it had arrested and start talking with them about a way forward. Maung Myint complained that NLD had been invited to participate in the National Convention, so they had no right to demand a tripartite process of the military, NLD and the ethnic minorities. He added that the National Convention had negotiated with the minorities, and now it was finished and could not be reopened. Charge asked why Hkun Htun Oo, a Shan ethnic leader who was participating in the National Convention had been given a long prison sentence. She again urged the regime to reach out to those now in prison and just talk with them. She said they loved their country as much as the military, to which Maung Myint agreed.

¶ 8. (C) Maung Myint assured Charge that the regime was on track for a political transition "very soon" and urged patience. He said the current situation was "very delicate and confused." He said pressure from the EU and Indonesia had not been helpful and made their Foreign Minister look bad in front of the international community. Charge replied that the international community was outraged by the violence used against peaceful demonstrators. She noted that the ASEAN statement was the harshest criticism she had ever seen, and added even China was sounding more critical. She warned that international pressure would likely increase unless some real progress was made, not by releasing people who should never have been arrested in the first place, but by embarking on a political transition that had broad popular acceptance.

¶ 9. (C) Maung Myint said that the Europeans had offered assistance with the planned referendum on a new constitution. Charge stated that the U.S. could also assist, pointing out that we had assisted with complicated political transitions all over the world, and could provide advice on elections, setting up political parties, and other transitional issues. He welcomed the offer, but did not give the impression there would be any immediate follow-up. Instead, he asked who had replaced Eric John as Deputy Assistant Secretary. He noted that Burma had sent three ministers to meet him. Charge provided him the name of Scot Marciel, but cautioned that further talks would be very difficult for us without further progress from where the situation was in June, and not measured from the recent setbacks.

What the Chinese Heard

¶ 10. (C) The Chinese Ambassador told Charge that Maung Myint had given him an update on what he described as the four requests of Gambari:

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release prisoners-some released already, more to come;
stop the violence-Than Shwe listened to Gambari; Maung Myint described their actions as restrained;
lift the curfew-which has been shortened. The Ambassador laughed when Charge commented from 9-5 to 10-4. Maung Myint said it would be lifted "according to the situation."
permit ICRC to visit detainees-the GOB would make "relevant arrangements."

Charge expressed surprise that Gambari had not discussed the need for a more inclusive political dialogue. The Ambassador replied that the Gambari's two meetings with ASSK should be seen as "most important" and that the mutual understanding between the UN and the GOB was good. He then said that China did not want to see unrest and wanted stability. He said they had asked the authorities to stop the bloodshed and improve livelihoods, and complained about a Washington Post article blaming China for the situation in Burma. The Ambassador agreed with Charge that the generals need to show more openness and flexibility by talking with a broader range of Burmese, and added that he found it very difficult to understand them.

¶ 11. (C) Comment: It comes as no surprise that the regime has a different message for the U.S., than the Chinese and Russians. Our opinion must matter than most, since they have not invited any other Ambassadors for briefings, which also means they want to continue talking with us. They clearly recognize that the Gambari briefing will be important, and have offered specific briefings to the three Embassies to make their case. The Chinese and U.S. agree on the need to bring more parties into the political dialogue, and the Burmese are hoping that their conditional offer will show

their openness. Although not enough, it does give us something to push for more.

VILLAROSA